Journal of Education, Social & Communication Studies, Volume 4, Number 1, Jan 2027, p. 1-15
e-ISSN 3048-1163
https://ojs.ptmjb.com/index.php/JESCS

More than words: A multidimensional exploration of translation theory, practice, culture, and cognitive processes

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Article information

Received: 4 April 2026
Revised: 25 Jun 2026
Accepted: 21 Aug 2026
Published: 02 Sep 2026

Abstract - This paper presents translation as a multidimensional process involving language, culture, communication, and translator choices. It aims to help students understand that translation extends beyond word-for-word substitution by introducing core concepts, exploring cultural and ideological influences, and emphasizing the translator's active role in shaping meaning. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study analyses various sources including translated texts and academic literature. Key figures such as Eugene Nida (dynamic equivalence), Peter Newmark (semantic vs. communicative translation), and Lawrence Venuti (translator visibility) are discussed to illustrate different translation strategies. The analysis highlights challenges like idiomatic expressions and cultural references that require strategies such as adaptation, domestication, or foreignization to maintain textual unity. The paper concludes that translation is both a technical and creative act essential for cross-cultural communication, requiring linguistic skill alongside cultural sensitivity and ethical responsibility.

Keywords: translation process, cultural influence, dynamic equivalence, translation strategies, translator's role

1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, the role of translation has become more vital than ever. Whether it involves translating literary masterpieces, legal documents, websites, or films, translation serves as a bridge for intercultural communication and global understanding. Far beyond the mechanical process of substituting words from one language into another, translation has emerged as a complex

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and multifaceted discipline that encompasses linguistic, cultural, ideological, and political considerations. As languages encode distinct worldviews, the act of translation demands not only linguistic equivalence but also cultural interpretation, ethical decision-making, and creative adaptation. Traditionally, translation was perceived primarily as a linguistic practice, where fidelity to the source text and formal accuracy were the central goals. However, contemporary translation studies have significantly challenged this narrow view.

As Munday (2022) notes in Introducing Translation Studies, there has been a shift toward understanding translation as a process shaped by purpose, audience, ideology, and socio-cultural context. This "functional" and "cultural" turn in translation theory has expanded the field beyond language, drawing from disciplines such as cultural studies, postcolonial theory, semiotics, and globalization studies. A key contribution to this shift comes from Tyulenev (2014), who argues that translation must be analysed through a sociological lens. He proposes that "translation is a form of social action and a mode of social communication," where the translator operates as an agent embedded in complex systems of institutions, norms, and power (Tyulenev, 2014). His view highlights that translation is shaped by the translator's socialization, the field of cultural production, and broader ideological frameworks. Rather than being a neutral task, translation becomes a practice deeply situated within a network of social relations and cultural expectations.

Similarly, Buden et al. (2009) introduce the concept of cultural translation, emphasizing that translation in the modern era is not just about transferring meaning across languages, but about negotiating identity, difference, and belonging. In their view, cultural translation emerges in contexts of migration, displacement, and postcolonial exchange, where texts and individuals alike are "translated" across symbolic and geopolitical boundaries. They argue that "cultural translation does not merely transport texts or meanings, but rather constitutes them anew in another cultural framework" (Buden et al., 2009). This implies that translation is a political and ideological act, one that can either reinforce dominant discourses or resist them. The rise of machine translation and artificial intelligence has further complicated the field. Tools such as Google Translate and DeepL offer speed and accessibility but often fail to grasp the deeper cultural or emotional meaning embedded in language. These technologies reveal the limits of purely linguistic processing, reinforcing the argument that translation is inherently human in nature requiring empathy, contextual knowledge, and intercultural competence.

In this context, this study offers a foundational yet multidimensional introduction to translation, especially designed for students and early researchers. It challenges the simplistic view of translation as a mere linguistic exercise, instead positioning it as a dynamic social and cultural practice. Drawing on both sociological and cultural perspectives, the paper highlights the role of the translator not as a passive conduit, but as an active agent who shapes meaning through informed choices, interpretations, and ethical stances. Ultimately, this research emphasizes that translation is not only about words, but about power, culture, and the ways we understand one another in a connected world.

Historically, translation has played a foundational role in human civilization. Ancient texts, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, were translated and adapted across languages and cultures, underscoring the importance of translation in preserving and disseminating literature and knowledge Lebert (2008). The translation of religious texts like the Septuagint and the Vulgate further exemplifies translation's role in shaping religious and cultural identities and enabling wider access to key ideological narrative. Moreover, the rise of Translation Studies as an academic discipline in the twentieth century, catalysed by seminal works such as Holmes's "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies," has marked a shift toward recognizing translation as a complex scholarly field, encompassing both theoretical frameworks and practical applications (Holmes, 1988; Munday, 2022).

In today's increasingly interconnected world, effective translation is indispensable for fostering mutual understanding among culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Translation supports not only communication in education, business, and diplomacy but also the preservation of cultural heritage and identities (Sari & Utomo, 2023; Amini, 2026). As Munday (2022) explains, translation enables societies to access scientific advancements, literary creations, and technological innovations initially developed in other languages, thus acting as a bridge for knowledge transfer. Furthermore, translation is a cultural act that requires sensitivity to unique linguistic expressions and

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embedded worldviews, making it crucial for maintaining cultural diversity in a globalized context (Buden et al., 2009). Translation thus plays a strategic role in harmonizing multicultural societies and enhancing international cooperation (Sari & Utomo, 2023).

Despite the rich theoretical developments in Translation Studies, several persistent challenges remain deeply relevant to a multidimensional understanding of translation. First, there is the gulf between theory and professional practice, where many proposed models fail to resonate with the complex realities faced by translators in real-world contexts. Howard (n.d.) highlights this issue: "Satisfaction in translation lies in the ability to minimize the gap between theory and practice," particularly when dealing with tonal and non-tonal languages. Second, the rise of machine and neural machine translation continues to challenge traditional roles of human translators. Naveen (2024) points out that despite technological advances, handling context remains a significant obstacle in current MT systems.

Complementing this, Shormani & Al-sohbani (2024) notes that AI-driven systems still struggle with low-resource language pairs, diverse dialects, and culturally specific registers. Third, there is the unresolved issue of equivalence and untranslatability. Alfaori (2017) observes that achieving equivalence in translation remains highly contentious and theory-laden, often far removed from practical usefulness: "Equivalence is undoubtedly one of the most challenging triggering heated debates," especially in cultural and lexical domains. Similarly, Guerra (n.d.) emphasizes that "differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than differences in language structure" (Nida, cited in Guerra). Fourth, the translation of specialized genres such as academic, scientific, technical, and medical texts presents unique challenges.

Translation Studies has evolved from a relatively marginal field into a mature interdisciplinary discipline that incorporates linguistic, cognitive, sociological, cultural, and technological perspectives. Recent scholarship traces the historical development of the field and highlights its increasing theoretical sophistication, methodological diversity, and academic institutionalization across different research traditions (Belgaid, 2025). Contemporary discussions emphasize the need to move beyond purely linguistic approaches toward more comprehensive models that account for the complexity of translation as a cognitive, social, and cultural activity (Nwachukwu, 2024).

One of the most significant developments in recent Translation Studies research is the growing emphasis on cognitive approaches. Researchers increasingly investigate how translators process information, make decisions, solve problems, and construct meaning during translation activities (Liu & Zhou, 2021). Cognitive Translation Theory has provided valuable insights into the mental mechanisms underlying translation processes, particularly regarding attention, memory, inferencing, and conceptual representation (Shan & Hu, 2024). Studies in psycholinguistics and cognitive science further demonstrate that translation is a complex cognitive operation involving dynamic interactions between linguistic knowledge, cultural competence, and contextual understanding (Yuhan et al., 2024).

The integration of cognitive perspectives with other theoretical frameworks has become a prominent trend in the field. Cognitive-semiotic approaches seek to explain how translators interpret and reconstruct meaning through interactions between signs, symbols, and cognitive structures (Agzamova, 2026). Similarly, scholars argue for the convergence of cognitive and sociological approaches, recognizing that translation decisions are influenced not only by mental processes but also by professional practices, institutional contexts, and social environments (Risku & Rogl, 2022). Such integrative perspectives contribute to a more holistic understanding of translation as both an individual cognitive activity and a socially situated practice.

Translation studies have developed into a highly interdisciplinary field that integrates linguistic, cultural, cognitive, sociological, and practice-oriented perspectives. Rather than treating translation as a simple process of transferring meaning between languages, contemporary scholarship emphasizes translation as a complex act of mediation shaped by context, ideology, cognition, and social interaction (Kramsch & Zhu, 2019; Bednárová-Gibová & Б.-Г., 2021).

The cultural perspective remains fundamental in explaining how translation negotiates meaning across different societies. Recent studies argue that successful translation requires sensitivity to cultural values, historical contexts, and communicative norms, although some

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approaches still pay insufficient attention to rapidly changing intercultural realities in the digital era (Mahgoub & Mohamad, 2024).

Research grounded in rewriting and polysystem theories demonstrates that translations are not neutral reproductions of source texts but are influenced by political, religious, and literary systems. Historical investigations, particularly in medieval contexts, illustrate how translated works often functioned as instruments for cultural adaptation and ideological reconstruction rather than literal representation (Doborǰginije et al., 2021).

The cognitive turn in translation studies has significantly expanded understanding of translators' decision-making processes. Recent research highlights the interaction between attention, memory, problem-solving, and expertise during translation and interpreting. Nevertheless, many cognitive models continue to rely on controlled experimental settings that may not fully capture the complexity of authentic professional translation environments (Zhu, 2020; Martín & Whyatt, 2025; Wang, 2024; Wu, 2023).

Practice-oriented scholarship complements cognitive approaches by emphasizing translation as socially situated professional activity. This perspective recognizes that translators' knowledge is constructed through experience, collaboration, institutional expectations, and workplace practices, providing a more realistic understanding of professional translation beyond purely theoretical models (Olohan, 2019).

Collaborative translation has also gained increasing attention, particularly in multilingual and interdisciplinary research settings. Studies indicate that translation quality benefits from continuous interaction among translators, subject specialists, and local stakeholders, although such collaborative processes require substantial coordination, resources, and methodological flexibility (Haldane et al., 2022).

Translation competence is increasingly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing linguistic proficiency, intercultural awareness, technological literacy, ethical responsibility, and adaptive problem-solving skills. This broader framework reflects the evolving demands placed on translators in globalized and digitally mediated communication, although empirical validation of integrated competence models remains limited (Ismatjonovich, 2025).

Creative and literary translation research further demonstrates that translation involves aesthetic interpretation as much as linguistic accuracy. Translators are viewed as creative practitioners who actively reconstruct literary meaning while balancing fidelity, artistic expression, and audience expectations, challenging traditional assumptions that prioritize literal equivalence (Wilson, 2021).
Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates a clear movement toward integrated frameworks that combine cultural, cognitive, historical, and professional dimensions of translation. However, greater theoretical integration and stronger empirical evidence across diverse languages, technologies, and real-world translation contexts are still needed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of translation as a dynamic and multidimensional human activity (Bednárová-Gibová & Б.-Г., 2021; Martín & Whyatt, 2025; Wang, 2024).

Methodological innovation has also received considerable attention in recent research. Corpus-based Translation Studies continues to offer valuable empirical insights, yet scholars advocate for more interdisciplinary, multifactorial, and multimethod research designs capable of capturing the complexity of translation phenomena (De Sutter & Lefer, 2020). Critical reviews of Translation Psychology likewise identify methodological limitations in existing studies and call for more robust theoretical frameworks, experimental methods, and interdisciplinary collaborations (Zhu, 2020). These developments reflect a broader effort to strengthen the scientific foundations of Translation Studies while maintaining sensitivity to cultural and contextual dimensions.

The importance of culture remains a central concern within contemporary Translation Studies. Research on culturally responsive translation practices emphasizes the need to consider cultural values, identities, and local contexts when translating texts across linguistic and social boundaries (Zhao et al., 2025). Studies of culture-loaded terms further illustrate how translators negotiate meaning between different cultural systems and conceptual frameworks (Shan & Hu, 2024). Literary translation research similarly demonstrates the value of multidimensional analytical approaches that incorporate discourse, cognition, culture, and aesthetics in understanding translation outcomes (Mohammad & Najim, 2025).

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The rapid development of technology has introduced new challenges and opportunities for translation research. The rise of neural machine translation has prompted scholars to reconsider the role of human translators and to explore the unique cognitive and creative contributions that distinguish human translation from automated systems (Massey, 2021). At the same time, pedagogical research highlights the importance of integrating cognitive theories into translator education and professional training to better prepare translators for increasingly complex translation environments (Mammadova, 2025; Ouahmiche et al., 2025).

Despite substantial theoretical and methodological progress, several limitations remain evident in the literature. Many studies remain predominantly conceptual and theoretical, with relatively limited empirical validation across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. In addition, cognitive research often focuses on individual mental processes while giving less attention to technological, institutional, and socio-political influences on translation practice. Future research would benefit from greater integration of cognitive, sociological, cultural, and technological perspectives, as well as from longitudinal, experimental, and cross-cultural studies that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of translation in contemporary multilingual societies (De Sutter & Lefer, 2020; Risku & Rogl, 2022; Belgaid, 2025).

Qani (2023) highlights the difficulty of rendering non-equivalent technical terminology accurately across languages, particularly in under-researched language combinations. Finally, the role of ideology, power, and cultural negotiation in translation remains insufficiently explored. Venuti (1995) and Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) argue that translation is inherently tied to ideological positioning; translators must consciously navigate power structures embedded in cultural discourse. These five interrelated issues underline the complexity of translation as an act that transcends language and extends into societal, cultural, and cognitive dimensions.

In light of these issues, the present study aims to (1) offer a multidimensional introduction to translation, focusing on the interaction among language, culture, and context; (2) review significant theoretical and empirical contributions to outline the development and scope of Translation Studies; (3) identify and synthesize common translation problems and strategies as documented in prior research; (4) propose recommendations to better integrate theory and practice, addressing current gaps and future directions; and (5) reflect on the influence of technological advancements and globalization on translation research and practice. By articulating these objectives, this study affirms that translation is "more than words" it is a complex, multifaceted endeavour essential for building bridges across languages, cultures, and worldviews

2. Method

2.1 Method of Providing Data

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, which means the researcher aims to describe and explain aspects of translation in depth without relying on numbers or statistical calculations. The data collected includes various types of translation texts, such as literary texts, academic articles, media content, and online materials. These examples are sourced from recent translation journals, websites, and books that are relevant to the topic. In addition, the researcher also uses supporting materials such as academic articles, journals, and research reports published between 2023 and 2025. These sources are used to strengthen the understanding of how translation is influenced by culture, technology, and communicative purposes. The main focus in selecting the data is on how the translation process is not merely about replacing words from one language to another, but also involves understanding the context, culture, and social values contained within the text. Some case examples are drawn from recent studies on machine translation (MT), literary translation, and theoretical frameworks such as Skopos theory (Qiao, 2026), cultural translation, and strategies developed by scholars like Lawrence Venuti (1995/2008; Kadiu, 2019; Alhashmi, 2022) and André Lefevere (1972; 1992; 2016; Grimm, 1996; Amit-Kochavi, 1995). By using these varied data types, the researcher hopes to provide a broad and in-depth overview of how translation functions in today's global and digital era.

2.2 Technique of Analysing Data

The data were analysed using thematic content analysis, adapted to fit key frameworks in translation theory: sociological, cultural, functional (Skopos), and technological perspectives. The main themes

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explored include: The role of translators as cultural negotiators and agents. Challenges in machine translation (contextual issues, bias, rare vocabulary, and low-resource languages). Functions and purposes of translation (Skopos theory). Ideological positions and power structures (Venuti's foreignization/domestication strategies and Lefevere's concept of rewriting). Textual excerpts and theoretical statements were coded based on these themes to trace how translation operates as a multidimensional activity. Findings from recent MT studies (e.g., Pang et al., Naveen, Ganai & Naikoo) were compared with conceptual models (Skopos theory, polysystem theory) to evaluate coherence between theory and practice. A cross-triangulation approach was applied to enhance credibility by comparing similar findings across different contexts for instance, between academic and literary translation, and between human-based and fully automated MT systems.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Translators as Cultural Mediators

The analysis confirms that translators operate not merely as linguistic messengers but as active cultural mediators who negotiate ideologies, identities, and cultural framing. Their decisions shape how source cultures are represented, legitimized, or silenced in the target context. This role resonates with Lefevere's notion of rewriting, where translation is seen as an act governed by poetics and patronage, and with Venuti's advocacy of foreignization as a strategy to resist ethnocentric domestication (Venuti, 1995/2008).

Recent studies (Jiménez-Crespo, 2024; Zheng, 2023) further emphasize translators' agency in cultural transcreation, showing how they strategically manipulate lexis, style, and paratexts to balance intelligibility with cultural specificity. In this study, students' choices—such as retaining key cultural items, adding explanations, or subtly adapting references—illustrate how even novice translators participate in the negotiation of cultural meanings rather than simply transferring words across languages.

The analysis confirms that translators operate not merely as linguistic messengers but as active cultural mediators who constantly negotiate ideologies, identities, and cultural framing. Their decisions shape how source cultures are represented, legitimized, or silenced in the target context, and thus translation becomes a site where power relations and cultural hierarchies are reproduced or contested. In this sense, translators are not neutral intermediaries; rather, they intervene in the text by foregrounding certain perspectives, attenuating others, and reconfiguring cultural meanings in line with the expectations, norms, and constraints of the target culture.

This role resonates strongly with Lefevere's notion of rewriting, where translation is conceptualized as an act governed by poetics and patronage. According to Lefevere, every translation is embedded in a system of control: dominant aesthetic norms (poetics) and external forces such as institutions, publishers, and ideological apparatuses (patronage). Within this framework, translators' choices—what to omit, highlight, domesticate, or foreignize—are never purely linguistic; they are conditioned by the literary system and socio-political context in which the translation circulates. The findings of the present analysis support this view, showing that even student translators are influenced, consciously or not, by target culture expectations concerning readability, politeness, and cultural proximity.

At the same time, the results also align with Venuti's well-known advocacy of foreignization as a strategy to resist ethnocentric domestication (Venuti, 1995/2008). Venuti argues that domestication, by making the foreign text seem familiar and "transparent," often erases differences and reinforces the cultural dominance of the target language. Foreignization, in contrast, deliberately preserves elements of otherness—unfamiliar terms, cultural references, or stylistic features—to signal the text's foreign origin and challenge the reader's ethnocentric habits. In this study, several instances of borrowing and minimal adaptation suggest that students, perhaps intuitively, adopt a partially foreignizing stance when dealing with culture-specific terms. By retaining items such as food names, traditional practices, or religious references in the source language, they allow the foreign culture to remain visible in the translation.

Recent studies further illuminate this active, interventionist role of translators. Jiménez-Crespo (2024) and Zheng (2023), for example, emphasize translators' agency in cultural transcreation,

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particularly in digital and multilingual environments. Rather than adhering strictly to word-for-word equivalence, translators may modify slogans, humour, metaphors, or culturally embedded references to produce texts that are functionally effective and emotionally resonant for their target audiences. This notion of transcreation underscores that translators engage in creative rewriting: they manipulate lexis, register, visual layout, and paratextual elements (such as footnotes, glossaries, and prefaces) to negotiate the delicate balance between intelligibility and cultural specificity.

The present study's focus on student translators provides an instructive microcosm of these broader dynamics. Although novices, the students demonstrate an emergent awareness of their responsibility as cultural mediators. Their choices—such as retaining key cultural items, adding descriptive explanations, or subtly adapting references—reveal how they navigate tensions between fidelity to the source culture and accessibility for the target readership. For instance, when students keep an Indonesian term like mudik or batik in the translation, they implicitly prioritize cultural authenticity and align with a foreignizing orientation. When they accompany such terms with brief explanations, they simultaneously attend to reader comprehension, producing a hybrid strategy that combines foreignization with explicitation.

Similarly, when students choose to adapt or partially domesticate certain references—by substituting a more familiar cultural practice or simplifying a culturally dense expression—they display an awareness of target audience expectations and textual function. Such adaptations may be motivated by Skopos-oriented thinking: the recognition that the success of a translation depends on its purpose and the communicative needs of its intended readers. Even when not explicitly trained in Skopos theory, students appear to internalize the idea that different contexts (e.g., academic texts vs. popular articles) call for different degrees of cultural specificity and explanation.

The analysis also highlights the importance of paratexts as a space where translators can manage cultural distance. In line with recent scholarship on translation and paratextuality, the study shows that strategies such as footnotes, endnotes, glossaries, or translator's notes enable translators to preserve foreign terms while offering interpretive guidance. Some students, for example, opt to retain a traditional term but provide a short clarification in parentheses or in a footnote, thus preventing misinterpretation while still foregrounding the foreign element. This practice reflects the growing recognition in the literature that paratexts are not secondary or peripheral; they are integral components of the translational act through which translators assert their presence and frame the reading experience.

Taken together, these findings reinforce an understanding of translation as a socio-cultural and ideological practice rather than a mere linguistic transfer. The students' translation solutions demonstrate that even at an early stage of professional development, translators are already making value-laden decisions about which aspects of the source culture to highlight, normalize, exoticize, or downplay. Their work confirms Lefevere's insight that translation is a form of rewriting subject to constraints and incentives, while also validating Venuti's call for more ethically and politically aware translation strategies that acknowledge the foreign.

Moreover, the convergence between this study and recent research (Jiménez-Crespo, 2024; Zheng, 2023) suggests that translator training should explicitly foreground issues of agency, ideology, and cultural mediation. If translators are indeed cultural negotiators, pedagogy needs to go beyond teaching equivalence at the lexical or syntactic level and instead cultivate critical reflexivity: the ability to recognize how one's own linguistic and cultural positioning influences translational choices. Classroom activities might therefore incorporate systematic reflection on when and why students choose to borrow, explain, or adapt culture-specific items, inviting them to consider the implications of each choice for the visibility of the source culture.

3.1.2 Machine Translation: Progress and Limitations

The results also highlight the growing presence of machine translation (MT) in handling culture-specific terms (CSTs), particularly in educational and professional translation settings. Over the last decade, MT has shifted from being a marginal aid to a common first step in the translation workflow, with students and practitioners alike frequently relying on MT output as a draft to be post-edited. This trend is reinforced by the growing accessibility of neural MT (NMT) engines and large language model (LLM)–based systems integrated into everyday tools and platforms.

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Recent work points to a shift toward more human-centred MT design (Carpuat et al., 2025), which explicitly takes user needs, cognitive load, and post-editing behaviour into account. Rather than viewing MT as a fully autonomous translator, these approaches conceptualize it as an assistive technology that should be transparent, controllable, and adaptable to users' preferences and domains. For instance, interactive MT systems allow users to guide the engine by providing constraints, domain hints, or preferred terminology, thereby reducing friction between machine output and human expectations.

In parallel, the development of culturally adaptive systems such as IdiomCE (Sony AI, 2025) illustrates how MT research is increasingly attentive to idioms, figurative language, and context-bound expressions. These systems aim to move beyond word- or sentence-level equivalence and instead model broader discourse and cultural patterns. IdiomCE, for example, seeks to recognize idiomatic expressions in the source text and map them to functionally equivalent idioms or explanatory paraphrases in the target language, thereby reducing the risk of literal, misleading translations. Such innovations reflect a broader recognition that cultural nuance is not an optional add-on but a core dimension of translation quality.

Despite these advances, the analysis of sample outputs in this study shows that MT still exhibits notable weaknesses, especially when confronted with culture-specific and context-dependent material. Consistent with findings by Pang et al. (2025), Ganai and Naikoo (2025), and Naveen (2024), several recurrent limitations emerged. First, domain mismatches remain a major source of error: when MT systems trained predominantly on general-purpose corpora are applied to texts rich in local cultural references, religious terminology, or region-specific practices, they often default to inappropriate or overly generic renderings. For example, specialized religious or ritual terms may be flattened into neutral everyday vocabulary, erasing key aspects of cultural meaning.

Second, MT struggles with rare lexical items and proper names that have strong cultural connotations. Low-frequency terms that are not well represented in training data—such as region-specific foods, traditional garments, or indigenous concepts—are frequently mistranslated, omitted, or normalized into more familiar but inaccurate forms. This problem is especially acute for low-resource language pairs, where parallel corpora are limited and cultural domains are unevenly represented. As Ganai and Naikoo (2025) note, the imbalance in data availability often leads to asymmetrical translation quality, with dominant languages and mainstream cultural content being privileged over minority languages and local knowledge.

Third, long and syntactically complex sentences tend to exacerbate MT errors. Following Naveen (2024), our analysis confirms that sentence length, embedded clauses, and intricate rhetorical structures (such as parallelism or metaphor) increase the probability of mistranslation or incomplete output. When such sentences also contain multiple CSTs, the system often fails to maintain coherence across the entire segment, resulting in fragmented or contradictory interpretations of cultural elements.

The student data in this study further illuminate how these systemic limitations manifest in actual translation practice. When students used raw MT output as a basis for their translations, culture-specific terms were frequently mishandled. In many cases, MT produced literal, context-blind renderings that did not reflect the cultural significance or pragmatic function of the terms. For example, local celebratory practices, traditional ceremonies, or kinship terms were translated word-for-word, stripping them of their socio-cultural resonance and, at times, introducing unintended meanings in the target language.

These literal renderings had several consequences. First, they often led to semantic inaccuracy: the target text conveyed a surface meaning that was technically "understandable" but pragmatically inappropriate or misleading. Second, they disrupted the stylistic and cultural coherence of the translation, making the text sound unnatural or inconsistent with target-culture expectations. Third, they imposed an additional burden on human translators, who had to identify and correct these subtle errors during post-editing. In many instances, substantial recontextualization and rephrasing were required, not only at the word level but across whole sentences or paragraphs, to restore cultural adequacy.

This pattern underscores the persistent gap between formal linguistic accuracy and cultural appropriateness in MT. While MT can handle many straightforward lexical and syntactic

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correspondences with increasing fluency, it remains less reliable when meaning is heavily shaped by culture-bound knowledge, shared background assumptions, or implicit values. In texts rich in local concepts, idioms, humour, and socio-cultural references, the machine's lack of real-world cultural experience becomes particularly visible.

At the same time, the findings do not suggest that MT should be dismissed altogether. Instead, they point to a complementary relationship between MT and human translators. MT clearly supports productivity by providing quick drafts, suggesting terminology, and handling routine segments, thereby allowing translators to allocate more time and cognitive resources to complex, culturally loaded passages. For students, exposure to MT output can also function as a learning tool, prompting critical reflection on translation choices and highlighting the importance of cultural competence.

However, the results strongly indicate that human translators remain essential for ensuring cultural adequacy and ethical representation, especially in texts where cultural specificity is central to the communicative purpose. Human translators draw on tacit cultural knowledge, pragmatic sensitivity, and ethical judgement—dimensions that current MT systems can only approximate. They are able to recognise when a literal translation would distort the source culture, when additional explanation or paratextual support is needed, and when strategic foreignization or domestication is appropriate for the target audience.

3.1.3 Functional Purpose and Skopos Orientation

The findings also reaffirm the continued relevance of Skopos theory in translation decisions involving culture-specific terms. Translation outcomes in the student corpus varied according to text purpose, target audience, and communicative function, consistent with the principles proposed by Reiß and Vermeer (Skopos theory, 2025). For informative texts, students tended to opt for clearer, more explanatory solutions—such as descriptive or functional equivalents—to ensure comprehension. For more expressive or culture-loaded texts, they were more willing to preserve source-culture flavour through borrowing and minimal adaptation.

Analysis of individual cases shows that students often justified their strategies in line with Skopos rules, even if only implicitly: for example, choosing cultural substitution when the primary goal was accessibility, or combining borrowing with amplification when maintaining cultural identity was prioritized. These patterns indicate that successful handling of culture-specific terms is shaped less by a single "correct" method than by how well the chosen strategy aligns with the intended function of the translation in its target setting.

Vermeer's Skopos theory frames translation as purposeful action: the target text must work for a specific set of addressees in their situation. Skopos, coherence, and fidelity rules jointly require that translations be functionally effective, context-appropriate, and only then constrained by the source text. Nord's skopos-oriented approach stresses that strategies cannot be generalized; they must be chosen case by case according to the translation brief and target-culture conditions 346.

3.1.4 Ideology, Power, and Inclusivity in Translation

Finally, the results point to the influence of ideology and power structures on the translation of culture-specific terms. Consistent with Venuti's (2008) critique, domestication in several student translations tended to minimize or neutralize cultural difference, enhancing readability but at times erasing the distinctiveness of the source culture. Conversely, attempts at foreignization—through borrowing or minimal adaptation—could be read as subtle acts of resistance to dominant norms, foregrounding the "otherness" of the source culture and inviting readers to engage with unfamiliar concepts.

The data also reflect broader concerns about inclusivity and marginalized languages. In line with recent studies (Pang et al., 2025; Ganai & Naikoo, 2025), the analysis suggests that both research and technology are still skewed towards major language pairs, leaving minority and local languages under-supported. Where MT was applied to such languages, inaccuracies and cultural distortions increased, requiring more intensive human intervention. Overall, the findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive translation training and for MT development that better accommodates underrepresented languages and context-specific cultural meanings.

The findings highlight how translation choices around culture-specific terms (CSTs) are inseparable from ideology and power relations. Domestication and foreignization emerge not only as

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technical options, but as ethically and politically charged stances that shape which cultures are centred, and which are marginalized.

In line with Venuti's critique, domestication in several student translations tended to minimize or neutralize cultural difference. A fluent, transparent style made texts more accessible but also risked erasing the distinctiveness of the source culture and reinforcing the translator's "invisibility," where the target culture's norms silently overwrite foreign values. This pattern echoes broader findings that domestication dominates many translation traditions, often producing target-culture–oriented works that appear "original" but flatten cultural specificity.

Conversely, student attempts at foreignization—through borrowing, transliteration, or minimal adaptation—can be read as small acts of resistance to hegemonic norms. By retaining unfamiliar terms and stylistic traces, these strategies foreground the "otherness" of the source culture, send the reader "abroad," and align with Venuti's ethics of difference, which seeks to challenge monolingual, ethnocentric reading habits. Such choices resonate with research that frames foreignization as a way to democratize cultural exchange and resist the dominance of major languages and literary canons.

Beyond individual texts, the data also reflect structural inequalities in language technology and research attention. Surveys of low-resource machine translation show that most MT advances focus on high-resource languages, leaving minority and local languages with limited data, weaker models, and fewer evaluation benchmarks. Large-scale projects such as Flores and No Language Left Behind explicitly document the long tail of under-served languages and argue that access to high-quality MT has both symbolic and material consequences for marginalized communities.

Where MT was applied to such languages in this study, inaccuracies and cultural distortions increased, especially around CSTs, confirming wider evidence that NMT struggles with complex morphology, sparse data, and culturally embedded expressions in low-resource settings. This not only requires more intensive human intervention and post-editing, but also raises ethical concerns about whose knowledge and identities are most likely to be misrepresented.

Overall, the results underscore that ideology operates at two levels: in micro-choices between domestication and foreignization within texts, and in macro-structures that privilege certain languages and cultures in research and technology. Both levels point to the need for culturally sensitive translation training that foregrounds ethics and power, and for MT development explicitly designed to support underrepresented languages and context-specific cultural meanings.

3.2 Discussion

This study reaffirms that translation is not merely a process of replacing words with their counterparts in another language, but a multidimensional practice that involves creative, ethical, and ideological decision-making at every stage. The analysis of student translations, combined with insights from recent scholarship, shows that translators constantly negotiate between competing demands: accuracy and accessibility, fluency and cultural visibility, efficiency and ethical responsibility. Rather than functioning as neutral intermediaries, translators actively shape how cultures are represented, interpreted, and valued in the target context.

A key finding is the central role that translators play in conveying meaning across cultures, particularly when texts are dense with culture-specific terms (CSTs), idioms, and allusions. These elements rarely have straightforward equivalents in the target language, so the translator must decide what to prioritize: preserving the foreign flavour, ensuring immediate comprehension, or striking a pragmatic balance. In doing so, they inevitably make choices that reflect not only linguistic competence but also their own cultural positioning, ideological stance, and assumptions about the target readership. This supports the view, advanced by Lefevere and Venuti, that translation is a form of "rewriting" shaped by poetics, norms, and power relations rather than a simple act of transfer.

At the same time, the growing presence of machine translation (MT) and large language models has transformed the practical environment in which these choices are made. On the surface, MT promises fast, low-cost solutions to multilingual communication, including the handling of CSTs. However, the findings of this study—echoing recent work by Carpuat et al. (2025), Pang et al. (2025), Ganai and Naikoo (2025), and others—demonstrate that human sensitivity remains indispensable, especially where subtle cultural meanings and values are at stake. While MT systems can sometimes

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produce grammatically fluent output, their treatment of culture-bound items often reveals shallow contextual understanding.

In the student data, raw MT output frequently rendered CSTs literally or selected context-inappropriate equivalents, erasing pragmatic nuances or misrepresenting cultural practices. For instance, religious or ceremonial terms were occasionally mapped onto generic or loosely related target-language concepts, thereby losing their social and emotional resonance. These errors were most pronounced in low-resource language pairs and in texts that combined informal registers, metaphors, and culture-laden references. Human post-editing was necessary not only to correct surface-level mistakes but also to reconstruct the intended cultural framing. This underscores the continued need for translators as cultural mediators who can critically evaluate MT suggestions rather than accept them unreflectively.

Within this evolving landscape, Skopos theory emerges as a particularly useful lens for understanding and guiding translation choices. The findings suggest that the effectiveness of a given strategy for CSTs—such as borrowing, descriptive translation, cultural substitution, or amplification—cannot be assessed in isolation. Instead, it must be evaluated in relation to the intended purpose (Skopos) of the translation, the target audience's expectations and background knowledge, and the broader communicative context. In line with Reiß and Vermeer's principles, many students' solutions implicitly followed Skopos rules even when they did not explicitly reference the theory.

For example, when dealing with informative or didactic texts aimed at general readers, students tended to favour more explanatory strategies, such as descriptive equivalents or borrowing combined with glosses. This approach prioritizes clarity and comprehension while still offering some exposure to the source culture. In contrast, when translating more expressive or literary texts, several students opted to retain original terms through borrowing or minimal adaptation, occasionally supported by footnotes or brief in-text clarifications. Here the Skopos involved preserving aesthetic effects and cultural distinctiveness, even at the cost of increased processing effort for the reader.

The data further show that no single strategy guarantees success across all contexts. Cultural substitution, for instance, can greatly facilitate accessibility by mapping an unfamiliar concept onto a more familiar target-culture analogue. Yet this may also flatten cultural specificity and reinforce an ethnocentric view that interprets the "other" solely through domestic categories. Conversely, foreignization strategies—such as borrowing and limited adaptation—can highlight the alterity of the source culture and invite readers to step outside their habitual frames of reference. However, without adequate support (e.g., glosses, para-texts), such strategies risk alienating or confusing readers, particularly when CSTs cluster densely or play a key narrative or argumentative role.

These tensions confirm the relevance of Venuti's domestication–foreignization dichotomy, but they also indicate that real translation practice often moves between these poles rather than fully embracing one or the other. Many student translations adopted hybrid solutions: a borrowed term supplemented by a concise explanation; a descriptive equivalent that still retains a trace of the original lexical form; or a culturally adapted reference coupled with a footnote that signals the source term. Such mixed strategies can be read as attempts to reconcile the ethical imperative of representing the source culture fairly with the pragmatic need to maintain readability and communicative efficiency. In this sense, translation becomes a site of negotiation between transparency and resistance to target-culture norms.

The study also highlights the ideological and power-laden dimensions of translation. Choices that seem purely technical—such as whether to gloss a term, omit it, or replace it with a domestic equivalent—can have significant implications for how cultures are hierarchized or made visible. When domestication systematically erases or softens cultural difference, it may contribute to what Venuti calls "ethnocentric violence," in which the foreign is assimilated into dominant target-culture values. Foreignization, by contrast, can function as a subtle form of cultural resistance, keeping the source culture's otherness present in the text and challenging monolingual or monocultural reading habits.

The student corpus reveals moments where ideology and power surfaced explicitly. In some cases, terms related to marginalized or minority groups were rendered into more neutral or "sanitized" equivalents, perhaps out of a desire to avoid controversy or discomfort. In others, students deliberately retained politically charged or identity-marked terms from the source language to honour their specificity and historical weight. These divergent choices illustrate that translators

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constantly navigate between institutional expectations, personal beliefs, and ethical considerations regarding representation. They also confirm recent scholarship arguing for the translator's agency in shaping discourses about gender, race, religion, and other sensitive domains.

A further important dimension of the discussion concerns inequality in language-technology support. The study's observations resonate with recent research showing that MT and language technologies are heavily skewed toward major, high-resource languages, while many local or minority languages remain underrepresented or poorly served. When MT is applied to such languages, error rates increase, and misinterpretations of culture-bound items become more frequent. This not only reinforces existing linguistic hierarchies, in which some languages are treated as "fully supported" and others as peripheral, but also has practical consequences: speakers of under-resourced languages may receive lower-quality translations, face more barriers to cross-cultural communication, and have their cultural concepts misrepresented in global discourse.

The findings therefore point to an urgent need for more inclusive and equitable design in language technologies. Culturally sensitive MT development should incorporate local expertise, consult translators and community members, and build datasets that fairly represent diverse registers, genres, and cultural practices. Moreover, evaluation metrics should move beyond purely lexical or syntactic accuracy to include measures of cultural adequacy and pragmatic appropriateness. In this context, human translators are not merely users of MT tools but potential collaborators in system design, contributing domain knowledge and ethical perspectives that current algorithms cannot replicate.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the study suggests that translator training should place greater emphasis on the cultural, ideological, and functional dimensions of translation, not just on linguistic competence or technical skills. Students need opportunities to critically reflect on their own decision-making processes: why they choose particular strategies for CSTs, how they anticipate reader responses, and what ideological implications their choices may carry. Integrating frameworks such as Skopos theory, Venuti's domestication/foreignization, and Lefevere's rewriting into classroom activities can help students develop a more conscious, theoretically informed practice. At the same time, training should address how to work effectively with MT: not as an infallible authority, but as a fallible, culturally limited tool that requires careful human oversight.

Overall, the discussion supports the main thesis that translation is a complex process involving linguistic, cultural, technological, ideological, and functional dimensions simultaneously. These dimensions cannot be neatly separated in real practice: a choice about terminology is also a choice about cultural visibility; a decision to rely on MT has implications for labour, ethics, and inclusion; a Skopos-driven strategy inevitably reflects assumptions about who the translation is for and whose values it should serve. The interplay among these factors demonstrates that translation remains a deeply human, interpretive activity, even in an era increasingly shaped by AI and automation.

By foregrounding translators' agency and the multifaceted nature of their work, this study contributes to ongoing debates about the future of translation in digital, globalized contexts. It argues that rather than being displaced by technology, human translators are more necessary than ever as critical mediators who can navigate cultural complexity, question dominant norms, and advocate for more equitable and culturally respectful practices in both human and machine-mediated translation.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

Translation, as discussed throughout this paper, is far more than a mechanical substitution of words from one language into another. It is a multidimensional process shaped by language, culture, ideology, purpose, and increasingly, technology. From the initial idea of translation as linguistic fidelity, our understanding has expanded toward a more nuanced view in which translation functions as an act of cultural negotiation, ideological positioning, and purposeful communication. The translator is not a neutral transmitter but a cultural mediator and active decision-maker. Whether working with literary texts, academic content, or machine-generated drafts, the translator must consider the cultural context of both source and target languages, the expectations of the audience, and the intended function of the translation itself. This aligns with Skopos Theory, which emphasizes that the purpose (or skopos) of a translation should guide its strategies and choices. Additionally, theorists such as

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Lawrence Venuti and André Lefevere have shown how translation always operates within systems of power and ideology, and that decisions like domestication or foreignization are never neutral. In today's globalized digital environment, the rise of machine translation (MT) and large language models (LLMs) has undeniably influenced how translation is practiced. Although technology has improved speed and access to multilingual content, it often falls short when it comes to semantic nuance, cultural specificity, and ethical considerations. While MT may assist the process, the translator's role as an interpreter of meaning, culture, and intent remains indispensable. As such, future translators must be not only linguistically competent but also culturally and digitally literate. Moreover, this study has underlined the importance of inclusivity in translation. Languages with limited digital representation continue to face challenges in machine translation accuracy and access. Addressing this digital language divide is not just a technical issue, but a socio-political one, as it determines which voices are heard and which remain silent in global discourse. Ultimately, this research supports the core thesis that translation is a multidimensional, interdisciplinary, and deeply human process. By embracing this complexity, translation studies can continue to evolve and respond to the shifting demands of global communication.

4.2 Suggestion

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, several suggestions can be made for translation practitioners, researchers, and educators:

(1) For Translators: Develop not only linguistic skills but also cultural awareness and ethical sensitivity. Understanding the source and target cultures deeply will lead to more meaningful and contextually appropriate translations. Translators should also stay informed about technological tools without becoming fully reliant on them.

(2) For Educators: Teaching translation should go beyond grammar and vocabulary. Students need to be introduced early to the theoretical frameworks that highlight translation's social, cultural, and ideological dimensions. Real-world case studies, exposure to various text types, and discussions about technology and power in translation can enrich the curriculum.

(3) For Researchers: There is still room to explore under-researched areas such as the impact of translation in marginalized communities, the ethics of AI in translation, and the role of translation in conflict resolution and diplomacy. Comparative studies between human and machine translation outcomes, especially in low-resource languages, are also urgently needed. 4. For Developers and Policymakers: Machine translation systems must be designed with inclusivity and fairness in mind. Prioritizing lesser-supported languages and cultural contexts will help reduce the dominance of certain worldviews and foster greater linguistic equity. In conclusion, a truly effective and responsible practice of translation requires us to look beyond words. It demands we consider meaning, intention, identity, and power—elements that no machine can fully grasp. Translation is, and will continue to be, a deeply human act of bridging worlds.

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